

GREETINGS AND FAREWELLS IN ARUBA.

*I once gave
you a card
1 km*

A

Miriam Laskin

Methods and Theories

Dr. Prof. Malefijt

(1)

In every culture of our world *people* certain courtesies upon meeting or leaving each other. *greetings* *farewells* are needed perhaps simply as an act of recognition, or respect that another person is also a human being and should be recognized as such, whether that person is a close friend, a stranger, or a hated enemy.

The symbolic act of recognition can and does vary greatly according to the particular culture and particular status of the individuals involved, but it is there to be noticed, no matter how subtle or different the actions may be.

Greetings and farewells can become quite mechanical, and need not involve an individual's actual emotion or even a thought. When we in the United States walk down a street and see an acquaintance, even one whom we have met only once or twice, or one whom we rarely see, we usually nod our heads, or smile, or utter some catch phrase such as "hi", "HELLO", "fine day" or the like. What is important is to recognize and give some recognition to the acquaintance that they have been seen and noticed.

Greetings can also be useful as signs of respect for a person of renowned or sanctified position. Here the ritualism involved in greetings becomes more apparent or noticeable because of a traditional stylization of greeting and respect accorded to these high-placed individuals. Tradition always demanded a certain type of recognition due a person of royalty. (The reasons for this being quite psychological, symbolic, and interesting, although this paper is not the proper place to go into this.) The Queen of England, when approached by one of her subjects, is the object of a rite of respect. The subject will bow or curtsy to the Queen, and perhaps even kneel before her and kiss her ring.

As with greetings, so also when individuals must separate after being together for even a few moments, must there be an act of farewell.

People do not simply leave one another when their visit or visit is over. Parting so abruptly is considered bad manners. Something must always be done or said before people separate.

This much do all societies and cultures inculcate into their members, and it is interesting to study the similarities and differences involved in the rituals of greetings and goodbyes of different peoples.

This paper is about the greetings and farewells of the people of Aruba. The Arubians are a mixture of nationalities, including mainly Dutch, Negroes, Orientals, and Indians, and Spanish. Emphasis has been placed on the native Arubians- those who speak Papiamentu as their native language, or the language used in their homes.

Observations have been made in the street, the stores and supermarkets, the airport, and in the homes of the Arubians themselves. (It is interesting to note here, that while they are called Arubans by visitors, the people of Aruba refer to themselves as Arubians or Arubianses.) The individuals observed greeting each other are mothers and sons (or daughters), fathers and sons, children, and people in the same age bracket, to find out what subtle differences there may be between an Aruban greeting a mother and one greeting a friend or younger person.

By far the most popular greeting of the Aruban is "Canta bay". (how does it go?) This greeting has variations depending on the speaker's age, his position with regard to the person being so greeted, and the familiarity of the two individuals.

Mothers are accorded a great deal of respect and affection in the Aruban household, more so usually than the father. (If there is a father living at home.)

When a son enters his house, it is usual for him to seek his

mother, calling out "machí!" (mama) and going to her, delivering a kiss or a hug, and saying "canta bay", or "cón bay" or merely "canta" if he is angry with her. Other variations in greeting a mother upon entering her house are, "tarde machí" (good afternoon mom) and "bon tarde mahes" (mahes is another form of machí.) One thing which remains the rule, is that the son or daughter always speaks first in greeting the mother, and almost invariably goes looking for her if she is not in view.

Greeting a father is usually on a less emotive and on a more casual basis. The son entering his house will greet his father with "canta bay, papa", "canta bay", or maybe "hi, dad." There will be no kiss or hug received.

A mother might return her son's greeting with of "canta bay machí" with "bon, y abo" (good, and you?), "cón abay away" (how did it go today?), or "cón eos bay na skol?" (what happened in school?) and sometimes a pat on the shoulder or kiss on the top of the head.

A father returning his son's greeting might say, "canta, mi yuba?" (how are you my son?) or "tarde mi yu" (good afternoon son) or perhaps "bo tin algo pa papa?" (do you have anything for your father? - a rhetorical question of course.)

Young people on Aruba, as in the States, have their own casual formulas for greeting each other, and here is found the greatest variety among greetings. Boys usually have one or two good friends whom they see very frequently - on the streets, at parties, and in each others' houses.

The streets of Oranjestad or San Nicolas often provide set "hang-outs" for groups of friends. A particular storefront is

(4)

picked as a known place to meet, talk, and watch others going about their business. Different spots along the mainstreet "belong" to different age groups. One spot may be for thirteen to fifteen year olds, another for those sixteen to nineteen, another for those twenty to twenty five or six, and yet other spots for men over these ages. Girls are found much less frequently in these groups, but sometimes two girls may stand around a certain store on their lunch hours or after school. The great majority of "hang-outs" are occupied by young men and boys.

A young man walking down the street and seeing a friend will walk over to him and with a friendly slap on the shoulder or fake karate-chop, will say, "hiko ta nasi skinan" (what are you doing around here?) or "conta ku e cuentan?" (how's business) Perhaps this young man may simply say "con bay", "conta", or "hi, con costa bay!" (how are things?) Still other greetings observed have been "Ki ubo?" (what's up?) or if the two friends have not seen each other in a while, "hopi tempu sin mirabu". (roughly "long time no see")

Two small children meeting each other may declare "hey! conta". or may simply walk up to each other and say "hi", then begin playing.

The common greeting for a boy to his girlfriend is, "conta bay dushi" (dushi is equivalent to our "sweetie" or "honey") Substitutes in place of "dushi" may be "suku" (bag of sugar), "carina", (sweet) or "vida" (life). A boy may also greet his girlfriend with "conta bay aki banda?" (how is everything on this side?) While respectful of his girlfriend's parents, a boy will simply greet them with "conta bay", "bon tarde" or "bon noche", and her younger brothers and sisters with "conta" and a pat on the head or shoulder. (as also with his own younger siblings.)

(5)

Perhaps it should be noted here, that the Arabians, as is also true of their Latin neighbors on the mainland, are a very tactile group. They tend to stand much closer to each other when talking than ^{do} North Americans or Europeans, as can readily be noticed when observing two Dutch women, then two Arabian women talking in a supermarket. With this close proximity of the speakers goes a corresponding tactility and wealth of gesticulation--pointing fingers, poking, slapping, pinching, patting, and pulling. The hands and arms seem to be an important aid and part of communication and emphasis for these people.

When introduced to a stranger, even one of the same approximate age, Arabians are extremely polite--a more noticeable difference from people in the States. Upon being introduced, an Arabian will invariably hold out his or her hand to shake, and say "ta un plaisir pa mi" (this is a pleasure to me) or "mucho gusto" (pleased to meet you) or "encantar". (enchanted) Even the young child will always reach out his hand when meeting a stranger.

Just as in our culture, the Arabians employ less variation in the ways they say farewell. We in the States may say "see you", "goodbye", "so long" or simply wave the hand to signify the end of a meeting. But the different formulas are not as plentiful as with greetings. The Arabians most heavily use "te oro" (roughly "goodbye") as a farewell. It is true however, just as with North Americans, that slightly different formulas are repeated between mother and son, two friends, etc. according to status or familiarity of the individuals. "Ayó" as a farewell is very

well known, but used only when saying goodbye forever or for a longer period of time than usual.

When a son or daughter leaves the house of their mother, in the morning for school or work, it is usual for them to kiss their mother and say "te oró". When the son leaves the house at night, he may call out as he is leaving, "te mañana", (until tomorrow- meant as a way of teasing.) or "mañi, ma bay" (Mama, I'm going) or "mi ta bay bin" (roughly the same as "I'm going now"). When a son is angry with his mother, he may call out as he leaves, "te otro seman". (until next week!)

The father may not be spoken to at upon his son's departure, or may receive a simple "te oró".

When two friends have to part, they may say "te oró", "te mañana", "bona noche" (good night), "hasta luego" (until later), or "te despues". One may sometimes say, "ki dia por wak bo" (when will I see you again) to a friend or girlfriend. A boy also says "te mañana" and "bona noche" to his girlfriend.

Children (those between the ages of five and twelve) usually call out either "daag" (Dutch) or "ayó".

As when greeting a stranger, the Arubian is again more formal in saying goodbye to someone he has just met. An Arubian will not shake hands though upon leaving, which is not the custom in the United States, where it is more usual to shake hands upon leaving than it is to upon arriving. The standard form of farewell in this case is, "mi ta spéra mirabo a trobe" (I hope to see you again soon). Occasionally one might say "te despues".

A most interesting and lively place to observe "long-term" farewells is at the Airport. Arubians leaving the country for a business trip of any length, or for a vacation, especially when it is their first time leaving, make up a different kind of experience than do those U.S. travelers who look at plane rides as a means.

Most usually the entire family including friends, arrives at the Airport with the expectant traveler. Here is an example of such a departure which is quite typical of most other farewells at the Airport on Aruba.

A son is going away to Venezuela for a vacation. He is seventeen years old. With him at the Airport are his mother, father, two sisters, and two brothers, and his aunt, uncle, cousin, and two friends. All sit down at a table and have coffee and cokes. The adults talk and mother gives advice and reminds her son on how to conduct himself, help with his hosts, etc. There is a lot of joking. The children run around and laugh. As time gets shorter, there is more anxiety and sadness apparent in the mother. The father is in general more quiet. When the boarding time has come, the family gets up to escort the son as far as they may, and the commotion is very apparent. The son's mother is crying and hugging her son to her, saying "cuida bo curpa" (take care of yourself) and kissing him again and again. The son kisses all his relatives, saying "avó" to each. He lifts up a sister and carries her around. (She is an older sister of about twenty) He pats his younger sister and brothers on the head and shoulder, and they tell him, "trése cos pa mí." (bring back something for me). The son then asks his friends to

"take care of things in Aruba for me." and then he and his father shake hands and say "ayo". All during this time, it is a bustle of chaos and emotion, with the mother predominating in attention and farewells. While the son goes across the airfield and enters the plane, the family stands outside and waves until the plane takes off and disappears.

Here has been recorded the main observations of Arabian greetings and farewells. We have seen that the most often used greeting in Papiamentu is "canta bay", which, although it means in English, "how does it go", is equivalent to our "hello", which carries no meaning except as a greeting. We know that the most usual Arabian farewell is "te oro", like our "goodbye". "Ayo" is another farewell, but its use is fairly restricted to more permanent separation, and it has no "direct" translation in English. We have seen that Arabians treat their mothers with much respect and affection, while the trend in the States is not in this direction- it is almost out of fashion so to speak. We have noticed that the use of gesticulation, touching and close proximity is very common and important to the Arabian.

It may strike one, perhaps with good reason, that any differences aside from language used, is one of degree rather than quality. This is true, because all (with one or two exceptions) that is said in Papiamentu may be given an equivalently close translation in English. It will be found that none of the Arabian greetings or farewells especially strikes the observer as totally outside the experience or knowledge of a U.S. citizen.

In effect, although it may seem different that the Arabs shake hands on greeting, and not in saying goodbye to a stranger, still, this custom is within our easy understanding, because we are familiar with the custom (ritual) of shaking hands.

This sense of familiarity with Arabian greetings and farewells is probably due to the fact that Aruba is after all an island in North America (although its close proximity with South America makes it culturally closer with the Latins), settled by Europeans and Americans, influenced by European and American cultures, institutions, industrialization, and education. Actually ~~educationally~~, the unique customs of the Caribbean cultures, ~~languages~~ ^{being} consciously ignored in favor of teaching European values, and Western languages like English, German, and Dutch.

But what is more important to remember for all people, is that no matter to which culture one belongs, the concept of the importance and meaning of greetings and farewells is readily understood. This is because it has indeed been ingrained into each individual by his society, even if this concept is not thought about consciously. So when one travels to a strange and remote part of the world, one may have to learn the accepted form of greetings and farewells for that place, but the idea behind these actions will already be understood.

Greetings and farewells are one of the universals of learned and necessary human behavior- learned and necessary because from the very beginning, humans had to make attempts at communication with their fellows. Although the symbolism and rituals employed may be different everywhere, the meaning is clear: recognize and show a certain respect for each other- we are all brothers.